

Semi-Centennial of Unitarian Society, Peabody, Massachusetts.
Formerly South Danvers and before South Parish of Danvers.

Written and delivered by Joseph Warren Upton.
June 26, 1876.

Read by his daughter Carrie Upton before the Ladies' Society
of the Unitarian Church, Peabody, Mass.

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Friends:-

A few days since I was requested by the Committee to prepare
a paper in relation to the Society. Upon examining the
records of the Society and consultations with our pastor I
concluded to speak -

1st of the corporation of Danvers as a district, its population
in 1752, and the population at present.

2nd. A description of the South Church exterior and interior;
showing what church accommodations our fathers had.

3rd. A description of this church as it was built in 1825-6.

4th Brief biographical sketches of the founders of this
Society.

Fifty years ago what is now called Peabody was then the
South Parish of Danvers.

What is now Danvers was then called the North Parish of
Danvers; these two had existed from 1709-10.

Danvers was incorporated as a district in 1752 and then
contained about 1968 inhabitants and this part of the town
about 1000 inhabitants.

Danvers became a town June 9, 1757 not with standing the
protest of Lieut. Gov. Hutchinson.

It should be stated here that a town was allowed to choose one or more representatives, but a district was debarred that privilege.

At the time of the dedication of this church the town of Danvers had a population of about 4000 and what is now Peabody had about 2300 inhabitants. At that time and for some years after there were no streets leading out of Main, Central or Lowell Sts. Then there existed no Elm, Holten, Pierpont, Park, Sewell, Franklin Sts.

Very few houses were standing on Washington St. and those were mostly at the North end.

Instead of seven churches as now only the Old South then 115 years old existed in this village. In fifty years the town has increased from 2300 to more than 8000 people. We have more inhabitants of foreign descent now than we had people then. From the Old South came many of the proprietors of this church.

The Old South was erected in 1711. At first 51 ft. long, 38 wide, 24 ft. stud. It was afterwards sawed in two both ways, so that it was $66\frac{1}{2}$ ft. long on Lowell St. and 55 ft. wide on Central St. At the west end stood the belfry about 15 to 20 ft. square and the height to the vane 70 ft.

The belfry had originally a spire but in my boyhood was surmounted by a cupola, similar to the one which was formerly upon this church. The original vane is of iron about 8 in.sq. with some oval ornaments at the two outer corners. This vane swung upon the iron spindles extending upwards from the belfry. It is now in the Plummer Institute (Essex Inst.) Salem.

The second vane was a gilt rooster and was taken down when the house was razed to the ground in 1836 and ornaments the Alms-house.

In the belfry was a door leading to the gallery and another to the bell deck. Windows were on the west end looking out doors and another looked from the church's lower floor into the lower story of the belfry. The reason is apparent when we consider that the gallery was the resort of the boys and young men of the congregation.

Upon looking into the house one might have seen at the north side a very high pulpit reached by a low stair-case. Over the pulpit suspended by an inch square iron rod was the sounding-board or canopy of many sides at the base, and of somewhat comical shape, the apex pointing towards the ceiling. Before the pulpit, slightly elevated above the floor of the house, were the Deacons seats.

On the floor were 79 pews mostly of an oblong shape, the backs reaching nearly to the heads of the worshipers when seated.

The seats extended on the three sides of the pews affording accommodations for 8 or 10 persons, about a third of whom sat with their backs towards the minister.

These seats were uncushioned and were attached to the upright supports by hinges. During prayer the seats were raised and the congregation leaned upon the tops of the pews. After the prayer the seats returned to their normal places, sometimes with fear, with considerable clamor. Rest for the weary heads and arms were afforded by leaners which were also hinged.

The house at the evening meetings was rendered somewhat light by several tin chandeliers furnished with tallow candles 6 to a pound. A few years before our church was erected, two small box stoves were placed (with much opposition) in the Old South. These were fed with wood and they afforded the coals for the numerous foot stoves which were in fashion, but afforded little warmth to the congregation.

The gallery was upon the East, South, and West sides. The choir occupied a portion of the south side and as by the records, the taxes were assessed upon the floor pews only, the presumption is the gallery pews occupied by the choir were free seats.

These pews were often, perhaps generally occupied by the boys and youths of the congregation, much I imagine to the annoyance of their elders, who occasionally, and even in the midst of the sermon, would rise in their seats, and with angry gesture or angrier words cow down the disturbers of the sanctuary for the time.

In many of the old parishes in Mass. a division had arisen a few years before this society had its birth; the younger people, especially took much interest in theological discussions. This division in the old parishes was an irrepressible conflict between the parites worshiping in the old churches. Many of them became Unitarians, but the Old South was Calvinistic largely, so those who were not strong in that faith came off and constituted this society.

After several meetings the society was organized in 1825 and soon preparations for building a church commenced. This building was dedicated July 26, 1826. The dimensions of the building are the same as the main building now. Across the eastern end of the room previous to its being remodeled was a gallery having in the central portion the singing seats which then rose one above another until the hindmost one was but a few feet from the ceiling. In the gallery was the organ, the first church organ ever owned in town. At either end of the singing gallery was a gallery for those who came to listen to the services, but they were often filled with those who came to play rather than to pray.

Upon the floor of the church were 70 pews each capacious enough to seat 6 persons. 56 of which seem to have been occupied by persons liable to taxation at the first assessment of taxes. 30 of these pews, 15 in a row were upon the floor extending from the eastern end of the room to within 10 ft. of the pulpit. 2 aisles extended from the E. to the W. end of the room and short aisles from those 2 to the N. & S. sides gave entrance to the other 40 pews, pews which were arranged 4 deep similar to pews in side galleries.

The pews on the sides had upholstered backs to them in most cases. All upholstering in those days was a private affair. As one paid his own money he had the choice between hair or straw.

No carpets on the aisles but one around the pulpit which was a plain mahogany one. The pulpit rested upon an imitation mahogany base which many thought was more natural than the growth of Honduras.

A glass chandelier suspended from the center of the ceiling, a few organ lamps upon the walls, and 2 upon the pulpit afforded light to the audiences attending the few evening meetings of that time.

A very cozy, comfortable church in warm weather altho' many in the side pews were often rendered uncomfortable by the sunlight blazing in their faces, when the slats of the stationary blinds were turned sufficiently to allow the minister to read his sermon; but a very cold place in winter, intensely cold until within a few years, notwithstanding the attempt to heat the building at one time by the two small furnaces made of sheet iron lined with bricks, at another, with cast iron coal stoves supported upon 4 columns over each aisle.

In 1829 a bell obtained by subscription was placed upon the church.

In Mr. Bigelow's time by the liberality of Mr. William Sutton and his brother Eben the present organ which had been in the old Hanover St. church in Boston was placed in the gallery and the old singing seats gave place to a few settees for the accommodation of a smaller choir.

Drapery from the same church was festooned behind the pulpit and was certainly an addition and by some considered a great ornament.

4th. I purpose to speak in detail of some of the men who were prominent at the formation of the society. It would afford me great pleasure to go into the biography of more had my time allowed me to prepare such and did your patience permit.

In preparing what few sketches I now offer I have in some instances adopted the language of those, who at other times have written of these individuals, but in no case have I done so unless the estimate of character has corresponded with my own.

In speaking of the congregation as I have known it during most of my life, having in most instances had a personal acquaintance with its

members, I speak from actual knowledge.

The characteristics of this society are in no ways peculiar in a New England town of the size and business. Most, if not all, of the people are of New England origin and have been from the beginning. About one-half of the original founders were young men from the farming towns of New England who came here and from small beginnings by their industry, thrift, persistency and good habits, shrewd calculation and close attention to their own affairs, in most cases succeeded beyond their greatest expectations. Not only succeeded in the acquisition of worldly goods, but built up characters for integrity and morality worthy of imitation.

These men fifty years ago were young men, very few being more than 40 years old.

Captain Abner Sanger a native of Keene, N. H. was about 40 years of age and was then and for many years afterwards engaged in a successful West India goods business as it was then called. He was also engaged in other enterprises and was one of the Proprietors of the tract of land extending from Main St. to Oak St. and thence to Foster St.

Sagacious and enterprising in his business he was also a philanthropist and entered with great zeal into the reforms of the day aiding them pecuniarily, as well as by council.

Ardent in the cause of the slave he was intimate personally with Garrison, Phillips and other leaders in that cause.

A friend of temperance being convinced of the evil of selling liquor he voluntarily abandoned the traffic thus proving his faith by his works. Retiring and reluctant to obtrude himself upon the public notice and not given to disputations with those who did not favor his reforms his opinions were of consequence enough for Edward Everett to address several letters to him, successfully proving that he, Mr. Everett never advocated negro slavery. Mr. Sanger died April /67age 81 years.

Mr. Benjamin Goodridge was in 1826 about 44 years old. He was a native of Salem. Mr. Goodridge was joint proprietor with Mr. Sanger of the tract of land upon a part of which this house stands, and was owner of much real estate in the village.

At the time of the building of this house he resided in the house now occupied by Mr. Daniel Ham. He was an active, energetic, impetuous, generous, sympathetic man, a public spirited and good citizen. Although largely engaged in the wool and morocco business, he also managed to build a fine hotel and carried that on until the disastrous fire in 1843 which destroyed the house. He continued in business, active nearly to his last day. He died Feb. 1864 aged 82 years.

Eben Sutton was 23 years old in 1826. He was man of strongly marked character. He was extensively engaged in business in Andover and interested in manufacturing elsewhere. He was a large owner of real estate in Andover and Peabody. At the time of his death he had been President of the bank for many years often giving his attention to it in preference to his private business. He was a member of the first board of Trustees of Peabody Institute. Being himself free from all

attempt at show he dispised shams in others. When he bestowed of his abundance means he did it in his own way.

He was considered by all who had any dealings with him as a man of the strictest integrity and honor, and as the records show was a liberal donar to the society. He died December 11, 1864 aged 61 years.

Gen. William Sutton one of those now living out of the original proprietors of the church was probably about 25 years old in 1826. Gen. Sutton is too well known for his generosity and kind feeling for me to go into great lengths in respect to his interest in the church and town.

Subscriber for 2 shares out of 43 we find him organist of the choir and later in Mr. Bigelow's time with his brother Eben, donor of the present organ, of which donation through the inadvertency of somebody there is no record and not even a vote of thanks.

In all times when subscriptions were called for the General's purse strings were ever unloosed and we find his name among the benefators as long as he was a member of the society which holds him in kind remembrance to this day.

Gen. Gideon Foster in 1826 was 77 years old. Gen. Foster was a man of more than common intelligence and ingenuity. As a mechanic he had much skill; the machinery of his own mills was of his own planning and construction and many derived important advanatges from his suggestions. He was town clerk representative in Gen. Court, a man of great energy enterprise and industry. Two disastrous fires robbed him of his wealth, but on his little farm at So. Peabody, with a Roman independence and more than Roman virtue, his own hands to the last ministered to his necessities.

He was commander of the minute men who marched from the Square towards Lexington in 1775 and reached West Cambridge, now Arlington in season to meet the enemy in retreat. He was captain of a company in the American Army beseiging Boston in 1775-6, also present at the battle of Bunker Hill.

He was buried from this church with military honors; Nov. 1, 1845 aged 96.

Hon. D. P. King in 1826 was 25 years old. G. Greenward says and it gives my impressions, he was a man of unob^trusive deportment without any striking qualities of address, always ready to be reckoned among common men, and courteously deferring to the claims and pretensions of others. With an unblemished character in private life and the means to command the pleasures, embellishments and ease of a more artistic mode of life, he continued to the last, to retain the habits and occupations and to adhere to the conditions of a farmer. He had a certain inflexibility of character running under all his actions not indicated by his manner or aspect for they were mild and complying to a degree that to a stranger or casual acquaintance would preclude the idea of any thing obstinate or even forcible about him; but fully brought to light whenever a crises arose, and demonstrated in the even and persistant tract of life.

From early manhood he was a member of the Unitarian congregation and church of South Danvers. He was an intelligent, sincere, devoted and constant worshipper and professor of that form of faith. At home in Washington or anywhere he was always found in reverent communion at the altar of prayer or the table of the Lord with those of that name however few in number or humble in position and no one could have thought of the possibility of shaking his convictions.

Mr. King was one of the State Rep. 1835-6, was Pres. State Senate 2 yrs. of the 4 he served. Member of Congress in 1843 to his death. On July 10, 1850, the day on which Gen. Taylor's death was announced to Congress Mr. King left for home somewhat ill and died July 25, aged 49 yrs. Yesterday was the 26th anniversary of his death.

Dr. Andrew Nichols in 1826 was probably about 43 yrs old. He died in 1853. He was a physician of a pure and childlike heart, sympathetic, not self-seeking, one who esteemed his own knowledge as very little, always learning, interested in natural science, in all public affairs, in all that goes to make up the liberal and intelligent minded man. Dr. Nichols throughout his life attended church with great constancy and took delight in doing what he could by precept and example to render it and its doctrines felt by those with whom he associated. A thorough believer he was in the capability of human nature to do something towards working out its own salvation.

John W. Proctor Esq. in 1836 was 35 yrs. old, a graduate of Harvard, in early life a teacher, surveyor, of farms. At the time of the founding of this church he was an attorney-at-law, having his office at one time in what is now Mrs. Kendall Osborn's house on Main St.

He was an active participant in all affairs relating to the town. He was a prominent member and officer of the Agricultural Society of the County and held some of the town offices, a Justice of the Peace, a Co. Com. for a short time.

At the Centennial Anniversary of the incorporation of Danvers as a district, he delivered the address, which is quite accurate in most respects as to historical details. He was an ardent friend of Education, temperance and the good of the town. Later in life he attended the South Church and for several years before his death he was a recluse owing to his great affliction-blindness.

A man austere perhaps, in his general appearance, he was a kind father and to those intimately acquainted with him a cheerful and valued friend. He died in 1874 aged 83 years.

Jonathan Shove in 1826 was 33 years old. A man of generous impulses and as Dr. Nichols says sincere astute "whose services, purse, great heart and faithful hand were ever at a needy friend's command," of social life the ornament and soul.

A man indeed in every station whole and yet not faultless. Who is faultless here?

Frailities he may have had- a little pride, "But e'en his failings leaned to virture's side.

A manly beauty his in form and face. Most winning in his manners full of grace. In all his movements; gentleness and love, marked the demeanor of the younger Shove. He died in 1847 aged 54 yrs.

Mr. Shove was the 1st Pres. of the Warren Bank, 1831. Representative 8 yrs. beginning in 1826, Senator, Bank Com., besides being engaged in the wool and leather business.

I find that Hon. Leonard Saltonstall and Benj. A. Merrill, Esq. of Salem presented the clock which hangs yonder and that Mr. Saltonstall was proprietor of a pew. Mr. Merrill was a most able and judicious lawyer and was counselor of many in the most trying times.

Mr. Saltonstall and Mr. Merrill were among the most noted lawyers of their time. Mr. Saltonstall was man of most ancient family and was a man who was universally respected and admired for the bland simplicity and purity of life, for the elegance of his conversation and all who knew him appreciated the kind qualities of his heart to which were added a high order of talents. He was tall, erect, courteous in his bearing to all; no one could have been with him a few minutes without being put at his ease, and unconsciously find himself perfectly at home with a man competent to fill any place in the gift of the people, but who did not consider it any condescension to be familiar with the humblest.

Mr. Saltonstall was a member of Congress for the district several times. He was Representative and Senator for the legislature previous to that.

Col. Caleb Lowe is a grandson of Maj. Col. Lowe who served as Capt. in the French and Indian War at Ticonderoga and became Major in the Revolutionary War.

Our Col Lowe was a young man in 1826. He was engaged in business, was interested in military affairs and took great interest in Church affairs until his removal from town. He is one of the few now living out of the 33 persons who agreed to build the church in 1825.

Capt. Nathaniel West though not one of the original proprietors was a friend of the Society. Capt. West was in life a ship master and merchant in Salem. He was owner of what is now called the Roger's farm. He built the house now owned by John B. Clement. This house was let by Mr. West to the Society for the ministers use for 5 yrs. at a rental of \$125. The house was occupied by Mr. Sewall until the close of his ministry here.

Capt. West bought a pew at the first sale and it was occupied by him and afterwards by Capt. Sanders and his family for years. Capt. West was probably the only person attending the church who dressed in the costume of earlier days.

When I look upon the full length picture of Washington after he became President and I am reminded of Cap. West who used to come up the south aisle on his way to his pew which was the third on the left hand side of the south west short aisle.

My father's being the front one upon the same aisle gave me a good opportunity to get a near view of him. I thought in my boyhood that he was a fine specimen of an old school gentleman. He comes before me now as though only an hour had passed away, instead of years. Six ft. or more, of a military bearing, well proportioned, head erect, dressed in full black suit the coat with ample skirts, long and full black vest, buttoned to the white neck cloth, short clothes to the knees, black silk stockings and shoes; a most imposing figure, as he came up the aisle impressing us small boys with the idea that he was somehow of a different make from us.

Rufus Choate seems to have been an attendant here but I suspect as he was in town only from 1823-1827 that he could not have been here often.

It is needless for me to speak in detail of Mr. Choate's character, as lawyer, advocate, for he is probably as well-known to you and his character could doubtless be more graphically portrayed by some of you than was done last winter by Mr. J. R. Fields.

Mr. Asa Sawyer's infirmities preclude his attendance here to-day.

At a later date we have additional names John Upton, my respected ancestor. Edward and Philip R. Southwick, the one a skilful physician, the other a chemist and leather manufacturer, by whose experiments, though ridiculed by some, many have benefited. Capt. Dan. King and Eben King the son of the latter has left us but whose presence is here with us, both thrifty farmers.

The brothers Little, William and J. Baily Little, leather manufactures, Nathan Lakeman, and Aug. R. Osborne both cashiers of the banks. John Dodge a worker in iron. Nathan Pearson, an energetic farmer, Samuel Cheever, Sylvester Osborn, Kendall Osborne, Fitch Poole, Lewis Elliot and others.

Time will not allow me to go farther into detail. Those of whom I have spoken were no more worthy or respected than the other gentlemen who occupied the pews of the church in the earlier or later days.

Mr. Oliver Saunders, Mr. Benj. A. Wheeler, Mr. Isaac Elliot, Mr. Wingate Merrill all have left us. Those who knew these men remember them for their great interest in this society and town. Quiet, unobtrusive, thoughtful men, their many virtues endeared them to us and showed us examples of worth without pretension of faith exemplified by works.

Levi Preston, Ward Poole, Jos. W. Cary, Rufus Wyman, Elzaphon Prince, Pheneas Chadwick, Edward Upton, Oliver C. Felton, Geo. Southwick, Major Moses Black, Moses Dole, Timothy Homes and I think those of the original proprietors not living. Of all these men the same may be said as of those mentioned.

Of the clerks of the Society, Mr. Oliver C. Felton, a native of Brookfield, then a teacher afterwards in Salem whence he removed to Brookfield. Clerk from 1825 to near the end of Mr. Sewall's ministry here. He was succeeded

by Stephen Upton, my father, who was clerk till near the end of Mr. Bigelow's time and who is now living at the age of 81 $\frac{1}{2}$ yrs.

Mr. A. K. Osborne 1st cashier of the Warren Bank formerly a shipmaster was Mr. Stephen Upton's successor. Mr. Osborne became a banker in Boston after removing from town. He was a man of action an acute and upright business man.

Mr. William Cutler was for many years clerk, a most earnest and devoted worker in the Sunday school of which he was Supt. for many years and also in anything that conduced to the welfare of the Society.

It can be said that these men were among the very best of the business men of the town, reliable, upright, honest **good** citizens such as in every town constitute the substantial, enterprising and progressive element; which has caused in the last 50 yrs. such an advance in all things that conduce to our material, moral, and spiritual improvement.

May we keep in mind the many lessons which are taught by the lives of our departed friends and may we be induced thereby to make our own lives more useful.